RAJYA SABHA

Thursday, the 28th November, 2002/7 Agrahayana, 1924 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock,

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Chairman is not here, as Mrs. Shekawat is not well. I think, on behalf of the House, we should wish Mrs. Shekawat a quick recovery.

SHRI SANGH PRIYA GAUTAM: The whole House joins you, Madam.

एक माननीय सदस्य: महोदया, वे कौन से हॉस्पिटल में हैं?

उपसभापति: अभी तो राजस्थान में ही हैं। If she comes here, then, I will let you know. Now, Question No. 141.

Metro Bus Service in Bangalore

*141. SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Will the Minister of ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government of Karnataka have submitted a proposal for approval to introduce Metro Bus Service in Bangalore; and

(b) if so, what action Government have taken thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS MAJOR GENERAL (RETD.) (B. C. KHANDURI): (a) and (b) This Ministry had received a proposal from Government of Karnataka seeking financial and technical assistance from Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) for a pilot project relating to introduction of Metro Bus System in Bangalore city. The proposal was recommended and sent to the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA).

SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Madam, I would like to know from the hon. Minister about the recommendation of the Ministry of Surface Transport because the Swiss Government has asked for exemption from customs duty; it is a 7-million-dollar project. So, I would like to know what their recommendation is. I would also like to know, when the recommendation was sent.

MAJOR GENERAL (RETD.) B. C. KHANDURI: Madam, firstly, I wish to clarify that in cases like this, my Ministry gives only the technical aspects of the recommendations and further processing is done between the donor agency concerned, the DEA and the concerned State Government. This proposal came to us on 29th May, 1997 from the State of Karnataka. On 27th June, we recommended their proposal, as it was proposed to us, in toto and sent it to the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA). Thereafter, it was examined by the DEA, in consultation with th State Government. Various correspondences went on and till August, 199 as far as our Ministry is concerned, we did not require to give any mor inputs. The DEA asked SIDA in August, 1998 to consider the proposa SIDA appointed a consultant of Sweden to go into this matter, who, ir turn, suggested that the whole thing should be done in four phases. They wanted this project to be done in a phased manner. The first phase which would be taken up as a pilot project would cost around Rs. 39.4 crores. Thereafter, the Government of Karnataka approached this Ministry in October 2002 for funding this entire project, through SIDA. We sent the proposal again to the DEA with our recommendation that this entire proposal should be funded by SIDA. This was done on 24th October, 2000. Thereafter the DEA got in touch with SIDA and the correspondences went on between them. And it was only in the month of September, 2001—the proposal having started in 1997—that the DEA wrote to our Ministry and this had been okayed by SIDA with various observations. In a nutshell, SIDA had said that the first pilot project should be undertaken by the State Government, with funding through concessional credit and thereafter, depending upon the outcome, the phases II, III and IV would be considered. The State Government said, "We don't want to do this with our funds. We want the pilot projects also to be undertaken by SIDA as a grant", which was not agreeable to SIDA. Thereafter SIDA gave an alternative proposal for funding through a credit line or a mix of grant and getting loan from some banks. But the Government of Karnataka did not agree to that and

said eventually in August 2002 that they would like to do it with their own funding. Now, they have made a mini project costing about Rs. 86 lakhs with the State Government's funding. This is the position, as far as our information goes.

SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Madam, my second supplementary is this. The Swiss Government has agreed to finance the pilot project and they have only requested that it should be exempt from customs duty because the cost would be higher. Now, is is a fact that the Swiss Government has agreed to fund to fund this project?

MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B. C. KHANDURI: As per my information and my Ministry, the proposal was not accepted by the Karnataka Government and they gave two reasons for it. One was the customs duty exemption for the buses which was required, was not accepted by the Ministry of Finance. And the second thing was that under this proposal there was a dedicated channel for the bus routes. The Karnataka Government felt that there was a congestion at various places, a separate dedicated route for the buses was not possible.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shri M. V. Rajasekharan.

SHRI M. V. RAJASEKHARAN: Madam, Deputy Chairperson, the manner in which the whole project is proceeding at a slow pace I do not think it would be completed. Would the Government of India consider putting all transport systems, wherever it has to be improved, both in the metro cities and otherwise, on a fast track? The second thing is, now, I am really surprised to hear the hon. Minister when he said that the Ministry of Finance has not agreed to waive the customs duty on this. Now, is it not the responsibility of the Central Government to see such projects are given all consideration and support? If they consider it as the most important thing to ease the congestion in all the metropolitan cities, why should they not take up this project as one of the important projects? Would the Ministry consider this proposal?

MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B. C. KHANDURI: Madam, Deputy Chairperson, two issues have been raised. One is that this is going on at a very slow pace and it should be put on a faster track. I agree in principle that things should move faster and that is why I have given the date and I have also told you about various milestones which have occurred during

this processing. Therefore, in principle, we agree that things should move faster, but we all know how our system works. Various as puts have to be seen various analysis and examination of issues have to be done. Therefore only certain projects are put on a fast track. But to put every project on a fast track, I do not think it will be possible even if it is desirable. The second thing that the hon. Member has said Sir, that the Central Government should also look at the transport sector and accept proposal like this. Again, in priciple, I would agree with him. But the Central Government has gone much out of its way to fund the project in the road sector. A project of Rs. 54,000 crores is now taken up by the Centre, totally changing the face of the road system in the country. We have also been providing Rs. 1,000 crores per year to the State Governments under the Central Road Fund for the State roads. We have also taken up the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojna which again is around Rs. 50,000 crores. Therefore, a massive amount of investment is going on in the road sector. But, if you say that every project that comes up must be accepted, I think, this will not be possible.

Meeting of foreign ministers

*142. SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH:
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:††

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether during the informal meeting in New York, the Indian, Russian and Chinese foreign ministers have agreed to meet officially for holding discussions between the three countries;

(b) if so, whether any date has been fixed for the meeting;

(c) if so, the agenda fixed for this meeting; and

(d) to what extent these three countries have formulated action plan to give a fillip to their relationship and have agreed to a concrete plan of action on various issues?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) At the informal luncheon meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Russia, China and India held on the margins of

††The question was actually asked on the floor of the house by Dr. T. Subbarami Reddy.